

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: SOMALIA

This essay focuses upon events during my service as President Bush's Special Envoy to Somalia between November 27, 1992 and March 10, 1993. In addition to crisis management, it covers elements for other categories such as public diplomacy, management across agency lines, and influence upon local leadership to accommodate US objectives.

Background: By late November 1992, some 300,000 Somalis had died of starvation and disease, and as many more were seriously threatened with death over the next six months. Ships carrying food for relief were being shelled and could not make port; food in the port could not get through to the starving because of warlords, militias, and bandits; a 500-man UN peacekeeping force was pinned down in Mogadishu and rendered ineffectual. Food delivered by USAF and other relief flights to the interior had little effect due to militia and bandit interference.

President Bush decided on November 25, 1992 that the US would undertake a humanitarian relief effort, led by elements of one Marine and one Army division, with broad international participation, and the approval of the UN Security Council. The operation was labeled by the Pentagon as Restore Hope; by the UNSC (which approved it) as the Unified International Task Force (UNITAF). The mission was "to establish a secure environment for relief operations" in that part of Somalia most affected by the famine and civil war, with an understanding that it would be followed by a UN peacekeeping force. The Bush Administration had no long-term plan for the political or economic rehabilitation of Somalia. As a lame-duck President, with a successor and a Congress just elected but not in office, President Bush understandably chose to leave long-term issues to the United Nations and to President Clinton.

During the White House meeting in which President Bush approved the plan presented by the Secretaries of Defense and State, my name was proposed and approved to provide high-level, experienced political and diplomatic input for UNITAF, and to help coordinate civilian activities of the US, other governments, UN agencies, and NGOs. There was almost no time for planning or preparation in Washington, either by the military or me, since there were only twelve days from the presidential decision to the initial landing. After consulting briefly with the department of State, I left for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and then Mogadishu, Somalia, arriving on December 7, 1993 in the company of an FSO political officer (Don Teitlebaum), who followed Somalia from the US Embassy in Nairobi, and a military advisor (USMC BG Frank Libutti) who had been in charge of the US-run airlift. We established our office and quarters in a two-house compound generously provided by the US oil company CONACO. Already present in country was an extremely capable, experienced USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) led by Jim Kunzer.

Early Days: While waiting for the US military to land, Teitlebaum and I contacted the two principal faction leaders in the Mogadishu area (Mohamed Ali Mahdi and Mohammed Farah Aideed), explained to them that the US was coming to provide temporary humanitarian help, not occupy or dictate to the Somalis; that we did not want any fighting, but that this was essentially the same force that had so easily defeated the

Iraqi Army in 1991. Therefore, it would be unwise and dangerously futile to resist them. They agreed. I also obtained, using a combination of cajolery and pressure, their agreement to meet together with the UNITAF Commander, LtGen. Robert Johnston, at our compound (flying the US flag) when he arrived on December 11. The meeting was held as scheduled, following the unopposed landing by US military units in South Mogadishu on December 7. The Somali leaders agreed upon a seven point program, and proudly presented it to the waiting media, including a cease-fire for the city, removal of heavy weapons to supervised storage sites; and removal of barricades blocking movement between the parts of the city controlled by each. They also agreed to establish a "Joint Committee" of their senior lieutenants for security and political affairs to continue the dialogue. Thereafter, the joint committee met every day at our compound, with a UNITAF officer and one of my political officers present, and on occasion, when there were important issues, myself and either LtGen Johnston or BGen. Zinni, his deputy for Operations and Plans. Thus, dialogue was very helpful in reducing suspicion and tension among Somalis and between them and the US and UN. (After the UN operation, UNOSOM II, assumed responsibility for UNITAF on May 4, 1993, the meetings stopped.)

Although we had not met before Mogadishu, Generals Johnston, Wilhelm, and Zinni of UNITAF, DCM Hirsch (who had been with me as DCM in Mogadishu twelve years earlier) and I enjoyed excellent personal relations, a common recognition that Somali political and cultural realities could seriously effect military operations (and vice versa) and a consequent commitment to work closely with each other. We were all mindful of Ambassador Smith Hempstone's famous aphorism that "if you liked Beirut, you will love Mogadishu," and determined to avoid the potential pitfalls. There was also an unusually valuable combination of relevant past experiences (Hirsch and I had served in Somalia during the 1980's; LtGen Johnston and I in Lebanon; MGen. Charlie Wilhelm, BG Zinni, and I in Vietnam, Johnston as Chief of Staff for Desert Storm; Zinni as Chief of Staff for Provide Comfort). We met every day, usually several times a day, in offices, at meals, and on missions.

To further enhance dialogue, reduce suspicion, increase understanding of Restore Hope, and minimize opposition, UNITAF initiated within the first week a very successful Psychological Operations effort, conducted by the US Army Psychological Operations Group from Ft. Bragg. A Somali language radio and newspaper (20,000 copies per day) carried news of UNITAF operations, relief activities, and other local news, plus a different verse from the Koran every day, local poetry, and relevant international news. My political officers (we had three, all with recent Somali experience) plus two excellent USIA officers (with much African experience) and the Somalis from the former Embassy USIA staff became part of the military Psy ops effort. In addition to the Joint committee dialogue and Psy Op, my DCM (John Hirsch) and I held scores of meetings with Somali civilian groups, including women's organizations, teachers, doctors and nurses, lawyers, etc. BGen. Zinni and some of his offices did the same.

This same broad outreach approach, involving my staff as well as key UNITAF officers, enabled us to supplement and make sense out of the intelligence available us through usual CIA and DIA channels. The 100 Somali-American linguists recruited for UNITAF were also used, with proper discounting of clan connections, to assist in understanding the local environment. All in all, we had reasonably accurate "cultural

Intelligence", a sense of the objectives, capabilities, popular support, weaknesses, frustrations, and way of thinking of the key Somali faction leaders. This included the emotional but shrewd Aideed, whom we treated as carefully as a bomb with a sensitive fuse that any bump could set off. When necessary, we confronted his forces with a warning, overwhelming force, and decisive military action. However, once a confrontation ended one of the Generals and I would sit down with him (or other faction leaders), discuss the incident and try to put it behind all of us. Often we would find some small issue on which we could give the Somalis satisfaction. This succeeded in avoiding the development of basic enmity toward the US by Aideed (or others). It also prevented an attitude of enmity by US forces toward the Somali factions (which occurred after UNOSOM II replaced UNITAF).

An unanticipated additional challenge presented itself almost at once as Christiane Amanpour, Ted Koppel, and other TV and print journalists clamored for interviews. Both LtGen Johnston and I were told to appear as often as possible, in order to maximize public support at home for Restore Hope. Our staffs were fully supportive of media desires for information or background or statements for the record. We also worked to ensure that foreign media, such as Italy, gained a positive appreciation of forces from their own countries.

During the first weeks, we established what became known as a humanitarian Operations Center (HOC), composed of a small military component from the UNITAF Civil-Military Operations Center, the USAID DART team, and the UN Relief Coordinator for Somalia (Phil Johnston, President of CARE, on loan to the UN). Daily meetings were held in the UN offices with over 60 International and Non-Governmental Organizations, using AID-supplied computers and US military help to compile information on country-wide humanitarian operations, exchange information and coordinate relief operations with one another and with military activities, and arrange for military protection of relief activities when and where it was needed and desired. (UNITAF planners took care to have food and other relief supplies arrive the same day military forces moved into a new location, starting with North Mogadishu on December 11.) IN addition to formal HOC coordination meetings, DART personal, my DCM, BGen Zinni, other UNITAF staff and I were in frequent contact with relief personnel to enhance understanding and reduce problems (e.g. use of armed Somali guards for relief organizations, threats from Somali factions, use of port facilities, etc). The relief workers' knowledge of the Somali society, economic, and political situation were also invaluable to us as "information" (the functional equivalent of intelligence, a word they could not tolerate).

The record of the HOC was most impressive. During its six months of life it supervised and coordinated the activities of some 60 different (and often difficult) relief organizations, supported over 235 security convoys, 130 unprotected relief convoys, and the delivery of some 40,000 tons of grain and the delivery of food the equivalent of 200 million meals. UNITAF also constructed or repaired some 2,300 km or roads and nine airfields for both military and relief use.

Moving Inland and Consolidating: After the second week, when the Mogadishu base of support had been secured and greater numbers of troops and amounts of material were arriving, UNITAF began to move inland where the locations of eight Humanitarian

Relief Sectors had been selected (with the advice of relief organizations). As each site was occupied by the US Marine Corps or Army units, I went first, with one or two Diplomatic Security escorts and no military, to talk with local clan political, military, and religious notables, and leaders of women's groups. The purpose was to convince them, as in Mogadishu, to welcome rather than oppose the military and urge them to set up local committees to assist with security and relief operations. At each locale, my own visit was advanced the previous day by a visit from one of my political officers (usually Teitlebaum) and one of the DART team who was personally familiar with the local power structure. At all locales, we – and the military units which followed the next day – were welcomed peacefully, even in the towns of Kismayo and Baidoa where there had been very recent fighting among different Somali factions. In the latter two, the oppressive influence of the dominant warlords remained to some degree. (Only after two armed clashes between two warlords in Kismayo, was the tension dissipated by removing militias from both factions over 50 km away from the town and forbidding them to return.) After an initial period, US military units turned over responsibility for each HRS to other UNITAF national units – Italy, Morocco, Canada, Australia, France, and Belgium. Other national units helped provide security for Mogadishu (e.g. Pakistan, Botswana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Tunisia), provided medical services (Sweden) or undertook other special functions. I created roving teams of one of my political officers and one of the DART team to maintain contact with the Somali leadership and the UNITAF unit responsible for each HRS, helping them facilitate good community relations, assisting international relief organizations, and developing relief projects – especially work for food projects whereby Somalis rebuilt roads, schools, irrigation ditches, etc. rather than waging civil war. By December 30, 1992, all HRS locales had been peacefully occupied, food and medicine were being delivered, and UNITAF was moving into the consolidation phase. This meant a deepening of security, regularization of food and medical supplies and services, rebuilding and repairing schools, providing farmers the seeds and tools needed to resume planting, rather than relying upon relief, etc.

It also meant implementing a plan devised by me and approved by UNITAF commanders for re-establishing the Somali civilian police force. The objective was to relieve UNITAF military by providing some indigenous protection against banditry and taking over forward guard positions for military and humanitarian headquarters, warehouses, and other facilities. The police had avoided the civil war by not taking sides, and returning to their homes or protecting police stations, but they stayed off the street. In Mogadishu, the reestablished police provided protection for some thirty dry-feeding stations that served over one million persons each week with no riots, thefts or other incidents. The police became very popular with the public, and tolerated by the faction leaders, providing a degree of indigenous participation in security matters. Several of them were killed or wounded in fights with armed bandits. They were not under the control of faction leaders, nor of UNITAF, but those in Mogadishu (more than 2,000 of them) reported to a committee of ten former police generals the UNITAF Provost Marshall had picked with the advice of the former US Embassy local security advisor (a former police colonel), and whom Ali Mahdi and Aideed approved after long talks with me. Seven of the ten turned out to be as apolitical and professional as we had hoped, the other three were ignored. UNITAF welcomed their help and provided them logistical

support and protection against potential attacks by local militias. BGen Zinni and the UNITAF Provost Marshall, on the military side, my political officers and I on the civilian side, and the UN Relief Coordinator provided them with overall support and guidance, arranging the provision of World Food Program supplies for the police and their families, and the supply of uniforms (by Italy), some vehicles and light weapons (mostly confiscated from militias for cease fire violations. Police forces similar to those in Mogadishu but much smaller were established in a dozen other locations, supported by various UNITAF units. For the most part, they were successful.

The Bush Administration and UN Headquarters permitted the police to be resurrected at our initiative and the use of local resources, but provided no help and basically did not approve of this exercise in local empowerment. They saw it as worrisome "mission creep." We saw the police, together with local political/security and humanitarian committees, and the maintenance of a reasonable level of security, as essential for the eventual establishment of indigenous authorities and institutions for conduct of the country's own affairs, for the completion of the UNITAF mission, and for the success of the UN peace operation that was to follow UNITAF and carry out a policy of political reconciliation - a long-term objective deliberately not included in the near-term mandate of Restore Hope.

The Bush Administration, with total support from me, LtGen. Johnston, and other force contributors, rejected UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali's assistance that UNITAF disarm, forcefully if necessary, the many Somali factions and armed bandits. This would have brought on innumerable firefights as individual Somalis as well as organized groups forcefully protected their weapons. It would also have required double or triple the number of forces, and diverting those assigned to protect humanitarian operations. However, once the Somali faction leaders agreed in principle in early January 1993 to voluntary disarmament, LtGen. Johnston and I each assigned an officer to work on an implementation plan. By mid-February, all fifteen factions had signed a gradual, region-by-region voluntary disarmament plan, and asked the UN and UNITAF to assist in carrying it out. LtGen. Johnston and I then convened a meeting in his office of the representatives of the major UNITAF units (Italy, France, Pakistan, Belgium, Canada, Nigeria, etc.) and the senior UN civilian and military representatives. All the UNITAF representatives agreed to begin voluntary disarmament right away, while they held the initiative and probably could bring the Somalis along. However, all insisted that it be done under the authority of the UN, since UNITAF would soon be standing down and handing off authority to a UN peace force, and voluntary disarmament was a long-term operation. When this proposal was put to UN HQ the response was negative. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali insisted that UNITAF accomplish disarmament on its own, not involving the UN, and put it as a precondition for deploying the UN force. The new Clinton Administration did not press the issue forcefully with the UN or other governments. The result was that wide-scale disarmament was never attempted by UNITAF, although many heavy weapons were confiscated or placed in controlled storage. The UN force deployed and assumed authority on May 4, 1993, with a mandate that included forceful disarmament, but with a weaker force and no understanding with the Somalis on this issue. Although this was one of the causes of UN confrontation with Aideed, the US military commanders never actually undertook a major campaign of forceful disarmament, since their forces were too weak. Meanwhile, the opportunity for

voluntary disarmament had been lost. The rest is history, as weapons of all kinds have proliferated unchecked throughout Somalia.

On March 8, I left Mogadishu and returned to Washington. There I met briefly with the new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, an old friend, Adm. Jonathan Howe. I returned to civilian life. John's assignment was to provide overall leadership to a strong UN operations, while the US moved to a supporting political and military role. On October 5, 1993, following the bloody battle of Mogadishu on October 3-4. I was asked to return as President Clinton's Special Representative for Somalia. That is another story.